

BEFORE THE  
POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20268-0001

Rembrandt Post Office     )  
Rembrandt, Iowa            )

Docket No. A2012-35

PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVE COMMENTS

(January 3, 2012)

After careful review of the Postal Service's Final Determination, the materials in the Administrative Record, the arguments presented by Petitioners, and the Postal Service Comments, the Public Representative concludes that the Postal Service has followed applicable procedures, that the decision to close the Rembrandt Post Office is neither arbitrary nor capricious, and that the Postal Service's decision is supported by substantial evidence. The decision of the Postal Service to close the Rembrandt Post Office should be affirmed.

The following comments are a few observations drawn from the Administrative Record of the Rembrandt Post Office Closing that may be helpful to address at community meetings in future post office closings. During community meetings, the Postal Service may avert some of the common community concerns by elaborating on information regarding: (a) loss of the community's identity; (b) hardship cases; and (c) the legality of rural post office closures.

A. Loss of Community's Identity

One concern mentioned in this docket is the loss of the community's identity. AR, Item No. 28 at 22 and Item No. 22 at 42b. Many patrons attend community meetings.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the Postal Service may consider providing more assurance to postal patrons during the meetings that their postal delivery address will continue to include their community name and ZIP Code and where possible the same P.O. Box number, if the customer intends to continue renting a P.O. Box. Alternatively, similar

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<sup>1</sup> In this docket, the Postal Service held a community meeting on April 19, 2011 between 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Rembrandt Fire Department. *Id.*, Item No. 21 at 1. Eighty-six people attended the community meeting. *Id.* Item No. 24 at 1.

information could be included in the form letter that accompanies each questionnaire dispersed to local postal patrons, as well as in the letters sent to patrons who return their questionnaires.

#### B. Hardship cases

In this docket, a few Rembrandt Post Office customers expressed concern that the loss of their Post Office would impact their ability to travel to another post office or even to the Cluster Box Units offered in this docket, because they were seniors and had difficulty walking.<sup>2</sup> At community meetings and in the form letters sent to those patrons who return the postal questionnaire, the Postal Service should consider providing more information about the assistance the Postal Service offers to those patrons that qualify as a hardship case. Further, the Postal Service should consider providing the information on what constitutes a hardship case, how to apply for hardship status, and where to obtain the necessary documents to begin the hardship qualification process. By providing patrons more information about the service, the postal service may relieve some patrons' anxiety. See Postal Operations Manual (POM), § 631.42.<sup>3</sup>

#### C. The Legality of the Closure

Between April and May 2011, twelve form letters were sent to Representative S. King and seven were sent to Senator C. Grassley requesting their support in preventing the closure of the Rembrandt Post Office based on economic reasons.<sup>4</sup> The form letters requested assistance because "Congress obligated the Postal Service to provide a maximum degree of effective and regular mail service to rural areas, communities and small towns where Post Offices are not self-sustaining."<sup>5</sup>

To minimize patron's assumptions that the Postal Service is violating the law, the Postal Service may provide more information at the community meeting and in the

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.* Item No. 22, 38b and 49b.

<sup>3</sup> POM § 631.42 provides for consideration of changes in the mode of delivery where existing methods impose an extreme physical hardship on an individual customer. Approval is to be based on humanitarian and not economic criteria evaluated on the basis of the customer's need and not denied because of increased operational costs or because a family member or other party may be available to receive mail for the customer. POM, Issue 9, July 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Administrative Record (AR), Item no. 28.

<sup>5</sup> AR, Item No. 22 at 3. See *also*, Item No. 27 at 1 and Item No. 28 at 1 through 28.

postal form letters sent to those patrons who return the postal questionnaire. Currently, the Postal Service's standard response appears to be – "The Postal Service is investigating several office[s] throughout the nation [ ] to determine if effective and regular service can be provided to the community by a more efficient alternative means." *Id.* Item No. 22 at 41. The Postal Service's response could be construed by its patrons as nonresponsive. The Postal Service may be assuming a level of understanding regarding postal law that does not exist. To clarify why a post office is under consideration for possible closure, the Postal Service may need to explain to its customers all the factors that are used in the determination – not just the economic savings. A clear and simple letter addressing all the factors considered may facilitate postal patrons' understanding of all the factors considered by the Postal Service prior to the postings of the Proposal to Close and the Final Determination to Close a Post Office. By elaborating on all the factors considered, the Postal Service may dispel the reaction that the closure is based solely on an economic basis.

In addition, the Postal Service may further postal patrons understanding of how the numbers presented in the estimation of cost savings are developed (shown in both the Proposal to Close and the Final Determination to Close<sup>6</sup>). If the Postal Service provided additional information in its explanations regarding the annual cost savings, by addressing the specific values used, customers may find the explanation helpful. For example: if the Postal Service added an explanation of why a specific EAS level salary was used or why Fringe Benefits were included, it may facilitate patrons understanding and forestall complaints that the estimates are incorrect because the current postal employee, possibly an Officer-in-Charge, does not receive a similar salary and/or fringe benefits.

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<sup>6</sup> See, AR, Item No. 41 at 8 and Item No. 47 at 7.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Pamela Thompson  
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